

*The Troll and the Vizier; a mythologically inspired short story.*

by Jonathan L. Wright

[This story, including the following prologue, was originally written in 2002, and first published online May 3, 2002. Spelling and grammatical errors corrected in Feb 2013.]

This is a mythologically-inspired short story, or fairy tale if you wish to be crude, that first germinated in November and took its final form in late January as a Christmas present to my ex-girlfriend. (That's not why we broke up.) Coming as it did at that time there is some influence by the Taliban on some of the villains in the story, especially in that the vizier is a vizier and he degrades the role of women. I even considered turning his "king" at the beginning of the story into a sultan, but thought that might be too obvious and an affront to Muslims. Enjoy!

Once upon a time there was a king. And this king was a good man who only wanted to rule correctly. One day he heard of a wise vizier who lived far, far away. He was so wise, that any advice he gave to his king was right. So the king said to himself "I must have this man working for me, doing what he did there, but for my country."

Then the king sent a letter to the vizier promising a thousand pieces of gold and his beautiful daughters hand in marriage for him to come to his country and advise him. The vizier had enough gold, but when he heard he had a chance to marry a beautiful princess he jumped at the proposal (realizing that one day, he should make the rules, not simply advise them).

So the vizier came with 55 of his servants. And the king had a huge celebration and was very excited. Now he had a new son-in-law and could govern the country correctly. The next day the vizier set out a plan in front of the king.

"This is how we govern correctly" he said "we will call all the subjects, then have them stand in groups of lines according to their position; once that is done my servants will inspect each group, find out what is right for them to do, live and wear; then we'll make that law and everybody in the kingdom will be doing his or her right thing, in his or her right place, wearing the correct color cloak."

The king didn't really listen to the vizier; he could have said anything, all the king was worried about was ruling the realm correctly, which he was convinced the vizier knew how to do. So he did anything his subordinate told him to.

All the people in the kingdom were ordered into town square. All the farmers were put here, livestock owners over there, those who did both here again. Then there were the artisans; first they were separated from the agriculturalists, then divided amongst themselves: butchers, bakers, and cooks over there; black smiths, gold smiths and ironworkers over there, and so on and so forth.

Each group had a different shade of a color for their cloaks, and as a general sign of what they could and couldn't do, could and couldn't do and so forth, which they shared with similar groups. Women were not put into groups, they were assumed to be house wives

and ordered to wear a lighter shade of the color their husbands wore.

Some women, however, were not housewives or were widows, and could not wear a lighter shade of what their husbands wore without violating the law by not wearing the shade of their trades. The wise vizier quickly remedied this: those women who were working at jobs other than their husbands had to quit, and those who were widows were ordered to marry the first man they saw. The wise vizier said this would be best because now every body would be in the right place, doing the right thing, wearing the right color cloak. But the vizier said that if just one person were not in the right place, doing the right thing, or wearing the right shade, the whole country would be incorrect.

Now there was a troll that lived at the edge of the forest in an enchanted tree. And the vizier couldn't find out what was correct for him, so he sent several of his servants to see how this troll lived and what would be the correct way for him to live. Though the troll was very courteous to the servants, he said he didn't want any part of the plan and sent the servants back with a little enchanted branch from his tree that was to be a gift for the king.

The vizier was enraged when he heard this. "How dare he!" he screamed "doesn't he know that by keeping to himself in that tree he is victimizing all of us!" So 30 knights were assembled to go and capture the troll. And they locked him up in a dungeon for many years.

One day the princess was wondering in an unfamiliar part of the castle when she found a strange door. The king and the vizier had always forbidden her to go into that part of the castle, but she was older now, almost a queen, and they didn't stop her anymore. When she opened the door she saw that it led into a dungeon, which surprised the princess because she thought that every one was right, correct, that there was no need for a dungeon because no one stepped out of line. But still it was there.

So out of curiosity, she went in. As she thought, there were very few people who would need to be in a dungeon. Actually there was just one person, an old troll who was chain-ed up to a wall, half starved. She asked him why he was there. He told her that he had done nothing to victimize the people.

The princess had thought it was a mistake that somebody would be down here. She let him out of the dungeon and apologized for her husband forgetting about him. The troll said it was OK and asked, "Oh, its fine, the vizier was just mistaken. Oh, and if I could ask one more favor of you"

"Say it," the princess said.

"I had a wand with me when I was arrested. The jailors took it away and said that they would put it in the kings study."

"Done" the princess said.

When the princess entered the royal study she saw the branch of the enchanted tree that the troll had given the king all those years ago. She assumed this was the wand the troll was talking about and brought it to him. When she gave it to him the troll said,

"Thank you. You know I can perform wonderful tricks with this wand, would you like to see?"

"Oh, please," said the princess.

So they went and hid in the kitchen and with his wand the troll switched the color of the butchers and the bakers cloaks. It was so ridiculous to the princess - seeing someone in an orange-red cloak bake while some one in a red-orange cloak butcher - that she started laughing uncontrollably. She laughed so hard that one of the vizier's servants heard them and came downstairs. When he saw that the butcher and the baker exchanged cloaks he was furious.

"How dare you?" he screamed "You were correctly doing your part, and now you're acting like idiots! Don't you realize that by putting on a different color cloak you keep us all from living in a correct country?"

Just then the troll waved his wand at the servant and his black cloak turned to gray. The baker laughed and said, "Ha, Ha, by your own rules you should be a farmer now. But we won't report you. Cloaks don't mean much to us."

At this point the farmer was speechless. He put his face in his hands; he could not believe he was out of place. By now the princess was having the time of her life, watching the antics of the troll, to whom she was getting more enamored, for the vizier had never shown her a good time before. "And now for some real fun," said the troll.

They went up to the vizier's chamber and found him lying on his bed staring at a picture of a cube. At the sight of the troll with his wife he exclaimed, "What are you doing with him! He is a defiler of the correctness of the people!"

"I really don't think that correctness is so important anymore." The princess proclaimed. "People can live and work in a world that isn't ordered by any person, and can still be happy. Besides correctness only gets in the way of some peoples lives."

With that the troll waved his magic wand and said, "*hic tyreanus est, haec trollianus est*," and suddenly the troll took the form of the vizier and the vizier took the that of the troll. Then the troll, the real troll that is, called up the viziers servants and told them to take that troll that was on his bed and put him in an enchanted tree at the edge of the forest.

The next day the vizier repealed all the old rules that weren't necessary. And all the people loved troll, err, vizier for it. The king was a little confused, but he figured, since the vizier knew what was right, he let him do what ever he wanted. The king wasn't really much of a king any more. So the prince and princess lived happily ever after.

THE END.